

Psychological Impact of Job Loss for Vocational Rehabilitation Veterans with Dual Diagnosis

In this qualitative study, MIRECC researchers Marcie Hebert, Psy.D., Charles Drebing, Ph.D., and Patricia Duffy explored the psychological consequences of repeated job loss and employment problems for those with histories of substance abuse and mental illness. Results from semi-structured interviews suggest that veterans with dual diagnosis who enter VR often have repeated negative experiences of job loss. Emotional and psychological reactions to repeated job loss were particularly salient, including shame, worthlessness, risk aversion, envy, anger and depression. The meaning of work for these participants was also explored and included themes related to money, self-esteem, freedom or access to choice, stability, and having a sense of purpose. Findings provide information regarding real life experiences of those seeking rehabilitation services and in particular the meaning that job loss and return to work has for these individuals. Results suggest participants with dual diagnoses experience repeated cycles of substance abuse, mental health difficulties, and job loss. Therefore, the combined effect of repeated job loss with mental illness and substance abuse can present a barrier to VR success and reemployment. Findings also suggest that targeting specific potential barriers such as shame, low self-esteem, substance abuse, and risk aversion could be particularly effective in assisting this group to return to competitive work.